Project Endings:
early impressions from our recent survey on project longevity in DH

Stewart Arneil, Martin Holmes, and Greg Newton

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- Endings: Concluding, Archiving, and Preserving Digital Projects for Long-Term Usability

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  - Maintaining long-term usability
  - Aligning aims of researchers producing projects and archivists

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- How sustainable are DH projects in the long-term?
    - 37 questions in 5 categories
    - 128 responses
    - 25 follow-up interviews

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- Most of the projects are less than 10 years old
- Most of them started with born-digital data
- More than half are ongoing

- Institutional support for preservation is generally available

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- The use of FOSS is quite common

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The Results

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- One-third use WordPress or Drupal

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The Good

- 54% used free and open-source tools
- 64% have offline backups
- 73% had campus partners offer support for long-term preservation
- 73% have NOT been affected by software obsolescence

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The Bad

- 24% do not have the project data available online
- 19% of the projects are dormant or abandoned
- 23% have been affected by software obsolescence

The Ugly

- 60% had no precise timeline for the project
- 80% of the projects remain incomplete and un-archived
- 54% had no long-term preservation in mind at the outset
- 90% considered their technical documentation less-than-adequate

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The Interviews

- 20 – 60 minutes each
- Marked up using TEI and a categorization scheme
- Analytics in-progress

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More planning around preservation/sustainability

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"I mean, we didn't know that Google was gonna turn off the API key one day"

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"I would probably need to reverse engineer them"

The Takeaway: projects

"I mean, we didn't know that Google was gonna turn off the API key one day"

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Consider how to preserve the most essential aspects

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"how do you protect a resource like this ... when the players leave the institution"

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"P.I.s die...or retire, you know"

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"P.I.s die...or retire, you know"

Plan for personnel change at the highest level

"they're ... resolved to consigning [projects] to oblivion"

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Make early arrangements for institutional hosting

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The Takeaway: projects

"Flash – need I say more?"

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"Flash – need I say more?"

"[software-title] was acquired by a competitor … and closed down"

The Takeaway: projects

"Flash – need I say more?"

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Use well-supported markup languages like XML/XHTML

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Many copies in many places (LOCKSS)

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Ending is easier if planned from the start

The Takeaway: institutions

"I don't think the institutions have yet found solutions [and] the researchers are finding ad hoc solutions"

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Researchers need project planning training

The Takeaway: institutions

"what's actually going to happen to it when you move on?"

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Projects need long-term library/archive support

The Takeaway: institutions

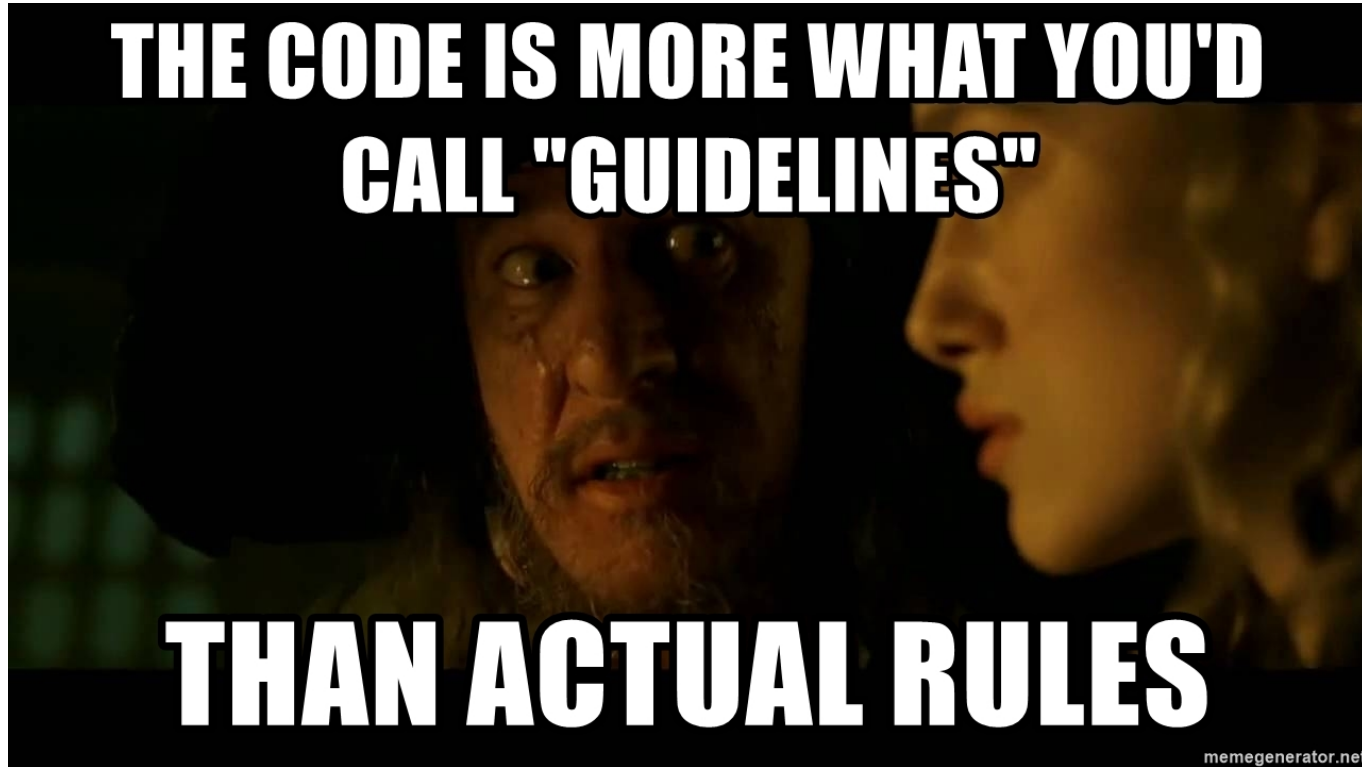*"what's actually going to happen to it when you move on?"*

"I know exactly what they're doing for me and what they are not going to"

Projects need long-term library/archive support

p.s. follow-up after project completion date

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THE CODE IS MORE WHAT YOU'D CALL "GUIDELINES" THAN ACTUAL RULES

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- *Data:* the expression of the source information, knowledge, and researcher expertise

- *Products:* project output intended for end-users (e.g. websites or print documents). Includes documentation.

- *Processing:* code written and maintained by project technical staff

- *Documentation:* includes data models and rights/IP issues

- *Release Management:* clearly identifiable releases made on milestones/successful validation

The Golden Ring

- Choose 'archivable' file formats based on open standards
- Avoid dependencies on exotic software, network, and databases
- Validate products and document the process
- Make principled releases to multiple open-access repositories

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The Future

- Workshops/seminars/symposia
- Test scalability with larger projects
- Formal publication of survey/interview findings
- Publish more guidelines, recipes, and toolkits

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The Questionnaire

https://hcmc.uvic.ca/endings/questionnaire.htm

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- Thought-provoking project assessment tool
- Useful for all DH project planners and every team member
- Draw focus to areas of a project that could be more sustainable

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The Questionnaire

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Come with us if you want your project to live

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